

For total freedom...



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AGAINST

PRISON

POLITICS

SOCIETY

recognition for 'political prisoners'. This type of language ignores the millions of individuals who are sent to jail simply for being part of the exploited class. Stealing, drug-dealing, and other acts of survival are considered crimes and the individuals who engage in this act are constantly at odds with this society and the cops who protect it, not because of a political program, but because their very lives are a threat to the maintenance of the social order.

We are opposed to the cops and the system they protect because we desire to live our lives in a way of our own choosing, and this has put us in conflict with the current social order. We have no interest in reforming the justice system, we want any system that intends to limit our freedom destroyed. We refuse to distinguish between 'political' and other prisoners, and we act in solidarity with all of the exploited who live in opposition to this system, because our struggle is the same.

ACAB

Reform is Repression by Other Means

This is a response to an article (<http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/story/fire-time-activists-brutalized-and-assaulted-transit-police-and-rcmp/12543>) written after a group of Fire This Time activists were harassed, assaulted and handcuffed by the Vancouver Transit Police and RCMP. While we are in solidarity with the three activists - as we are with anyone who is a target of the state - we feel like the rhetoric used in their response to the situation is a rhetoric of reform and therefore a language that does not challenge the existence of the current social order and the cops who actively protect it.

First, the article is not explicitly anti-police, only anti-police brutality. The criticism of police brutality is inherently liberal and doesn't acknowledge that the police play a role (specifically the role of enforcer) in a larger system that is inherently violent. The idea that it is only isolated incidents of overt violence by some cops that are harmful suggests that it may be possible to reform the police into a 'good institution'. This is obviously impossible, since the police exist within a very specific context - a system that exists to benefit a small minority at the expense of the rest of us. So long as cops exist, their role will be to impose and enforce the laws of this society, and this will always place them in opposition to the exploited class. There are no good cops, there are no just laws. The only solution is to attack both the idea and the physical manifestations of the police and justice systems.

Second, the use of the language of rights and democracy. We must go beyond begging the state for more rights, because as long as we continue to legitimize the state's authority in this way, we will always be slaves to it. Any right the state gives us can be taken away in an instant. The article's outrage at the "assault on our democratic rights" fails to recognize that the very function of this system is to perpetuate itself. Of course, if it can do this as 'gently' as possible if it prefers to do so, but the overtly repressive hand of the state is always waiting. We need to stop struggling for more 'just' laws and new reforms, and take matters into our own hands. This requires a project based on direct action and attack with our own personal desires and lives as the basis.

Lastly, the article and its slogan of "Stop harassment and assault of political activists" suggests that there should be special

Anti-Politics and Revolutionary Solidarity

There appears to be a trend in radical circles of distinguishing prisoners based on their so-called 'crimes', with the intent (conscious or not) to identify 'political prisoners' who, by virtue of their actions, are more deserving of support and solidarity. Prisoners who have been targeted by the state due to their political beliefs and/or actions are given special attention amongst radicals, while the rest of the prison population spending their days in a cage are often only an afterthought, used as a means to lend credibility to political ideology, or completely forgotten.

This privileged and moralistic practice has invaded radical circles and creates a distinction between 'political' and 'ordinary' prisoner. Political prisoners are said to have been imprisoned unjustly, unlike the rest of the prison population. This can manifest either as an insistence of their innocence (as in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal), or, in cases in which the prisoner has obviously broken the law, they are viewed as acting only in response to unjust laws or conditions (as in the case of Walter Bond). In both cases, their innocence is maintained.

But stating that some prisoners are innocent implies that others are guilty and deserve their punishment, that some unjust laws should be broken, while others should be upheld. This distinction requires predefined ideas of what is right and wrong and the application of those ideas in all situations and to all individuals, regardless of context. This process of taking subjective ideas, reifying them as universal moral principles and claiming their objectivity is no different than the state claiming that to uphold their laws is to uphold 'justice'.

The idea of justice is also problematic in that it reduces the struggle into a political debate over whose ideas are the most morally just. In this context, all actions are mere civil disobedience, attempts to expose the injustice of certain laws and to have them replaced with new ones.

Only acknowledging political prisoners devalues the experiences of all of the exploited class who are arrested for breaking the law simply to survive. Those who steal for food, sell drugs for

money, and squat or sleep on the street due to the conditions that this society has forced them into are not sent to prison because of political consciousness, but because their lives, their very existence, has placed them in conflict with those in power.

Some anarchists have attempted to broaden the definition of political prisoner to include all prisoners. But to be political means to identify with a specific ideology and to believe that the universal application of that ideology will result in a better world. Since all political systems require institutions to uphold them, political action must involve either an attempt to reform current institutions to benefit a new system, or in the case of radical politics, the abolition of current institutions and the creation of new ones in their place.

If it is accepted that to be political is to act with the explicit goal of reforming institutions to suit a new political system, then the term cannot be applied to individuals who are harassed and arrested because of their place in the exploited class. They are not targeted because of any belief system, but because they are forced to break the law just to survive. They have no choice but to live in opposition to this society, and to reduce these lives to mere politics is an inaccurate and unfair representation.

Also, as anarchists shouldn't we be fighting against political ideologies, not creating new ones? If we are struggling against this system in its totality, we should strive for a freedom based on creating conditions of existence and relationships on our own terms, and not just more freedom than we currently have by way of institutional reform.

The term political does not include those of us who do not see the struggle against this system as separate from the rest of our lives, those of us who are consciously engaging in a project of creating ourselves in a way that completely rejects the domination of the state and capital. These struggles, along with those that the exploited class engage in everyday, are directly opposed to the authority of any political program and are therefore anti-political. Not only should the label of 'political' be undesirable because it represents the thing we should be fighting against, but it is also a misrepresentation of the struggle that many people are engaged in.

None of this is meant to imply that all prisoners deserve our unconditional support. Solidarity should not be given out of obligation

lives. The gentrification of Woodward in East Van, the transformation of community space into commercial stores patrolled by security is another example. Everything needs to be monitored or replaced by structures that can be.

This is all said to be for our protection, but in reality it is what protects this society from us. We are all potential criminals in their eyes. Any deviation from the set of social roles that maintain order, any attempt to create our lives on our own terms need to be repressed by this system. So control is expanded, externally in the form of surveillance, data collection and policing, but also internally. When we uphold laws as if they were our own values the state achieves the ultimate form of control. When we have completely internalized the rules of this society, when we we don't act on our desires because to do so would cause us to break the law, when we form 'community' watch and policing programs that do the cops' job for them (and when we blatantly snitch on our family and friends with encouragement from the cops, as happened after the Vancouver hockey riots in 2011), we are complicit in the re-creation and expansion of prison in our daily lives. This is why establishing alternative forms of law enforcement and punishment cannot be a part of a radical and revolutionary response to prison. Such institutions will never eradicate prison because they are based on the same fundamental value – control. Even if prison were to be abolished, without overturning the society that necessitates it it would just be prison by another name and only benefit those in power by creating the illusion of a more just society. As the revolutionary group Os Cangaceiros wrote, “*reform is repression by other means.*”

I have chosen to place myself at odds with this society. I attempt, whenever possible, to live my life on my own terms and this involves a rejection of both the state and capital. This has put me in conflict with the current social order and as such, the threat of prison is always a possibility. For those of us who refuse to submit to the rule of law, as well as for the individuals for whom it is not a choice, prison is not just a distant place. It is a necessary condition of this society that we experience every day.

My struggle against prison cannot be separated from my struggle against the totality of this society and the cages that exist all around me.

expanded and new laws are created, intent to control our actions and gain more power over our lives. If in acting on our desires we come into conflict with the law, we are labelled as criminals.

For those of us struggling to create a different type of world in the face of what this society offers, breaking the law may be a part of our projects, forcing us to become outlaws and rebels.

For individuals who live on the margins of society, breaking the law may be a necessary part of life. Every day people are arrested for stealing, drug dealing, prostitution, sleeping outside and other acts of survival, and this process is intensified in attempts to 'clean up the streets'. These individuals may or may not make a conscious choice to oppose this society, but these illegal acts always put them at odds with those in power.

Whether it is by consciously engaging in actions against the state and capital, acts of survival or both, for an increasing number of us, prison – the place where the outcasts of society are sent – is becoming a reality.

But it's still easy to think of prison as a separate place, something that doesn't affect us when we aren't experiencing it directly. At worst it's a looming threat, something to avoid at all costs. And it's true, prison is a different place, a different kind of existence. I can't pretend to know what prison is like. But in order to ensure that we don't deviate from our prescribed roles, this society must control and monitor our behaviour. Prison is the most obvious and totalitarian form, but it isn't the only one.

The mechanisms of control imposed on us are constantly expanding, and they aren't hard to find. CCTV cameras monitoring public spaces, set hours of operation in public parks, internet sites that collect our personal information to hand over to whoever wants it, and the increase of security and cops are just a few examples of how prisons are expanding outwards, becoming a normal part of society. As control expands, prison in its current physical form becomes less necessary – house arrests and ankle transmitters used to monitor our arrested comrades show that prison is quite capable of moving beyond four walls. In Vancouver, the addition of fare gates and the huge increase of armed cops and security cameras along public transit lines are obvious manifestations of state control extending into our daily

or a sense of duty. That is the foundation of liberal activism and cannot be the starting point for any radical project. Solidarity needs to start from ourselves and our own struggles, and extend to people in whose struggles we can see our own, with those who we have real affinity with. We should be pushing the actions of our imprisoned comrades forward as their accomplices. If our friends need support it should be given in the spirit of mutual aid and never as charity. We need co-conspirators and comrades, not self-sacrifice in the name of the struggle.

But while we may not agree with the thoughts and actions of all prisoners, and there are certainly some who we would despise completely, we should be clear that we oppose putting *any* person in a cage for deviating from 'acceptable' social behaviour developed to maintain the current social order.

For the destruction of all prisons, for the release of all prisoners, for total freedom.

Thoughts on Snitching

A snitch is a person who informs the police about illegal or suspicious activity. Snitches will appear to be members of our networks and communities, which is why we need to strengthen our ties and have each others backs. A tight crew will be much harder to infiltrate and if we all support each other, informants will be less likely.

Snitches can be undercover police who pose as radicals to infiltrate our groups. They can be our comrades who, caught in moments of weakness, talk to the police about the actions or plans of someone else. They can be liberals who feel our tactics have gone too far, neighbours who overhear a conversation, friends who disapprove of our actions.

The greatest accomplishment of the state has been its ability to manifest itself inside each one of us and snitching is an expression of this. We've been taught to uphold the state's laws as our own values and now instead of a police state, where the enemy is obvious, we find ourselves in a self-police state, where it's not only those with

uniforms and guns we must be wary of, but those who wear their uniforms on the inside.

It's easier to follow rules laid out before us than to critically think about what we're doing, and this is how the state's control has leeches into our communities.. Why do some call the police on their neighbours, grab the person breaking windows in a peaceful protest, snitch on Vancouver 2011 rioters? It's because they have fully incorporated state control into their own lives. They have been duped into thinking that the (in)justice system actually has our interests in mind, when it is only concerned with its own perpetuation.

The arms of the state have extended into every aspect of our lives, alienating, scaring, and training us to consume, to not think or live for ourselves, and to villainize those who do. This is why we need to fight against the expansion of prison into our daily lives and at the same time fight against the current social order that is based on control.

Of course, we must feel that those we choose to share our lives with are solid comrades and these relationships will develop naturally in the course of our struggle. We must not become so obsessed with security culture that we isolate and alienate ourselves from potential comrades (or else we have done the job of the state for it!)

Quick note on security culture:

The call for the development of a "security culture" seems strange to me. When I first heard the term, my immediate thought was: "That is precisely the sort of culture we live in!" The cops and cameras on every corner and in every shop, the increasing numbers of identification cards and of interactions requiring their use, the various weapons systems put in place for national security, and on and on — the culture of security surrounds us, and it is the same as the culture of repression. Certainly, as anarchists this is not what we want.

Many of the practical suggestions made by the proponents of security culture are basic good sense for one who is taking action against the institutions of domination. It is obvious that one shouldn't leave evidence or speak to the police, that

one should take the due precautions to avoid arrest — a situation that would certainly not enhance one's struggle for a full free life. But it makes no sense to speak of a security culture. The caution necessary to avoid arrest does not reflect the sort of life and relationships we want to build. At least I hope not.

—Wolfi Landstreicher

Instead of internalizing the laws of the state, we should establish what we want, and live our lives according to our own desires. This can be a starting point of creating real community with individuals with whom we have affinity. These projects are not separate — real communities will arise out of our struggles against the state and capital.

Prison, Prison, Everywhere!

There is a place in this society where one is perpetually under surveillance, where every movement is monitored and controlled, where everyone is under suspicion except the police and their bosses, where all are assumed to be criminals. I am speaking, of course, of prison..

Within the walls of prison there is no freedom of choice, no illusion of democracy. There is only prison. Daily actions are regulated by strict schedules and enforced by armed guards, the choice of when, where and with whom to spend time completely taken away. Every action is surveilled with suspicion. All individuality, all identity is destroyed and replaced by that of prisoner, of criminal. Prison is the complete realization of this society's need to isolate all of us from any real interactions and force us into predefined roles. So long as the masses are exploited and forced to submit to the laws of the few in power, prison in some form will remain a necessary institution.

Prison exists to enforce the law, a set of regulations we are told represent the values of society. We are forced to adopt these values as our own when in reality they represent the behaviours required to maintain the current social order. Existing laws are